

Cropland Idling

Issue No. 5b - DRAFT Pasture Idling

Background

Issue

Like alfalfa, pasture is a multi-year crop that requires renovating periodically to keep the fields weed free and healthy. Once idled, pasture would require reseeding or a complete re-working of the field before returning to full production.

Discussion

There have been many transfer requests based on idling of pasture. The requests have been declined due to the extreme variation in quality of pasture and actual baseline evapo-transpiration pattern of applied water (ETAW) values. Pasture quality variation can range from poorly irrigated weedy grass with low ETAW (if any water is applied at all) to lush well managed mixed pasture with full evapo-transpiration (ET) demand. This point is very important due to resources needed to verify the quality of pasture prior to the transfer period to assess the value of the specific transfer (quantity of real water available). An alternative to specific transfer review would be to assign an average ETAW value to pasture and assume real water amounts average out between good and poor pastures.

Under a pasture idling program, growers would irrigate the pasture following their typical practices in the spring and early summer. The pasture would then be completely disced under by July 1st to assure no water is being used by the pasture. The water the pasture would have used in July, August, and September would then be made available for transfer.

Recommendation for 2010

Do not allow pasture idling as a method of making water available to the 2010 Drought Water Bank until further study can be completed.

Future Discussions for Long-Term Program

Study of irrigated pasture ET and ETAW to estimate ETAW values for program in potential source areas.